

Family Gardens, an Emerging Discourse in the Sahrawi Community

Small scale family gardens started to emerge in the Sahrawi community in the Hamada Desert, southwest Algeria around 2002. Currently, there are over one thousand gardens spread in the five Sahrawi refugee camps. Leading figures in the process are Sahrawi agricultural engineers and gardeners who have been researching and developing the garden practices together with the families. The theories and practices have become rule-based knowledge in the gardening community. The phenomenon is redefining food perception and diet in the camps. It is taking part in the process of creating a new discourse and narrative for the Sahrawi.

The Sahrawi have been pastoralist nomads in Western Sahara. The lifestyle they were leading comprised a number of traditions and rituals fit to cope with the surrounding desert environment where Sahrawi were used to live. As we study the family gardens, one of its central parts seems to be an aim to have a self-sufficient way of living. Gardens and agricultural knowledge are starting to change people's perception about food production for this community where dependency on international aid has been the case since the arrival of the Sahrawi to the refugee camps in 1975.

Pekka Niskanen and Mohamed Sleiman Labat are using the concept of discourse as an analytical tool in their three year artistic research project: PhosFATE. One approach to discourse is based on Foucault's discursive theory. Discourse could be condensed to mean a certain way of speaking or describing the chosen object of knowledge. The archaeological method of Foucault seeks to pinpoint the time and place when certain discourse emerged and how that discourse became meaningful and powerful. In our research we name the Sahrawi family garden as a discourse. Foucault names "institutions, political events, economic practices and processes" to be non-discursive practices. We will look at the Sahrawi family garden practices as a central non-discursive formation. However, we don't make a hierarchical distinction between discursive and non-discursive while bringing up the Sahrawi knowledge production.

PhosFATE is an artistic research project by Niskanen and Sleiman Labat funded by Finnish Kone foundation and several other foundations. The project follows the multi-layered story of phosphate in the Baltic region as well as in the desert. In the project they film, discuss and write about the different aspects of phosphate. They created an experimental small scale family garden in Helsinki paralleling the family garden phenomena in the desert. The artists use the garden as a meeting point to develop research questions and topics.

Sleiman Labat is a visual artist and a poet from the Sahrawi refugee camps. He was born and raised in these camps. In 2016, after graduating from Batna University with a degree in English literature, Sleiman Labat went back to his community. In 2017 he collaborated with English poet Sam Berkson to collect the oral poems from the greatest desert poets, and translated them into English. They came out in a book called 'Settled Wanderers'. Sleiman Labat has built a multipurpose community and artist studio space Motif Art Studio in Samara camp. The studio itself is built from discarded materials that Sleiman Labat has collected. The studio is now a small hub for art creation and art education in Samara camp. Motif Art studio hosted a number of workshops, interactive sessions and collaborations with local and international collaborators of various ages in art workshops, presentations and talks.

Pekka Niskanen is a Helsinki and Paris based media artist, filmmaker, researcher, and a Doctor of Fine Arts. He has been exhibiting since 1990 in museums, galleries and film festivals around Europe, North America and Asia. His dissertation in University of the Arts Helsinki is titled *Art in the Construction of Identity Politics* (2014). He has curated several exhibitions in Finland and abroad. Niskanen has worked as a director of several community art film and video projects. He has worked in theater productions where his responsibilities have been mainly set design and costumes e.g. Verdi's Rigoletto in Göteborgsoperan. His teaching and pedagogy in the universities is based on shared responsibilities with the student groups not forgetting the diverse and different places and positions by the participants.

Taleb Brahim has a masters in Agriculture and a Permaculture Design Course from the Turkish Institute of Permaculture. He is the National Director of Home Gardens in the Sahrawi Refugee Camps, he is also a consultant to a number of NGOs such as OXFAM and WFP. He leads the process of creating the gardens and educates the families participating in the garden projects in a series of workshops and trainings. He brings up scientific understanding about plants and vegetables, their needs and ways to adapt to the environment in the desert through various methods and techniques. Brahim also writes about his research and findings.

Najla Mohammedlamin graduated with an associate degree in art and science and is currently majoring in sustainable development and women's studies at Whatcom Community College, Bellingham, Washington. Mohammedlamin is the founder of Almasar Library Center; a sustainable library in Tifariti, Samara Camp. Built from local materials and on ecological principles, the center addresses the subjects of knowledge and sustainability on many levels. It has three main goals, creating a future generation of readers, empowering women and protecting the environment. The

library center runs a series of educational, cultural and ecological activities throughout the year, but especially in the summer when the students return to the refugee camps. They work with children and students of different levels.

As a group, we will take turns facilitating the different discussion parts. For example, Sleiman Labat will present and ask the questions to which Brahim will answer to elaborate the discussion. Then Brahim presents and asks questions from Mohammedlamin who will interview Niskanen. Sleiman Labat and Niskanen will deepen in a mutual discussion the background and context on their artistic research. We will all wrap up our common discussion parts and make conclusions, so the contribution is distributed equally between the speakers. We will give plenty of time to questions from the audience to allow more discussion and give space to diverse perspectives to arouse. Niskanen will be the chairperson of the interaction with the audience.